
Regardless of Party,

If their Proposal would harm our Pensions, we will oppose them.

On Friday June 19, 2009 one proposal announced by Ohio Governor Ted Strickland, was to bring the State's budget in line with its income by reducing the state's contribution to the pension fund from 14% to 8% of salaries. Realizing this would have a devastating effect on the benefits OPERS could provide, we went into immediate action. Throughout the weekend I was in contact with the executive director of OPERS, as they worked the figures to determine the projected effect on the retirement system's ability to continue providing pensions and meaningful health care to its members.

I held conference calls with many of the stakeholder and union groups, and on Wednesday morning, June 24th, we held a joint press conference at the Statehouse to voice our unified objection to using our pensions as a money source for operating the State.

Our general message was: Opening the door by using pension contributions to cover present-day shortfalls will result in the ultimate downfall of Ohio's PERS, just as it has with every pension system, public and private, where the pension fund has been turned into a cash resource for the government or a company.

A legislative email alert went out and retirees got on the phone to the Governor, the Speaker of the House, and the President of the Senate.

My specific presentation at the press conference follows: On behalf of Ohio's retired public employees and their families, we want to thank Governor Strickland for searching for new and innovative methods of addressing the unique financial situation in which the state finds itself. We urge Governor Strickland, and the Ohio General Assembly, to balance Ohio's budget with the elimination of things, not the health care of Ohio's retired public servants.

After studying the facts and materials we presented, they ultimately removed the proposal from the budget bill.

On the Other side

On April 15, 2011, I gave testimony on Substitute H.B. 153 before the House Finance and Appropriations Committee. HB 153 is what is commonly known as the budget bill, and in it Governor John Kasich proposed addressing Ohio's budget deficit by changing the contribution percentage amounts required to fund the pension funds.

By gathering the facts from the Public Employees Retirement System, the PERI legislative council, John Gilchrist, and I put together testimony, which I presented to the Finance and Appropriations committee.

I closed my testimony by saying, "Ohio's pension programs are honest, equitable, and good for Ohio's economy. Ohio's current economy is like an automobile with everything broken except for the water pump. Please don't break the water pump. Fix the rest of the automobile. We need our political representatives to understand and protect Ohio's pension Plans, not use them as a source of state funding."

In this case, our testimony, along with our reputation of being factual in our presentations, was enough to convince members of the House and Senate, and the governor's office, to drop the proposal.